

**POETICS OF THE UN-POETIC:
SEMIOLOGICAL DISORDER IN AGUSTO DE CAMPOS'
*POPCRETOS***

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Abstract Poetics of the Un-Poetic-Semiological Disorder in Augusto de Campos' *Popcretos*" proposes a comparative analysis of the use of collage in the works of Campos, Sousândrade, and Ezra Pound not solely in terms of poetic invention, but rather in terms of understanding how cultural changes impact language. That collage became the means of choice for these three poets to address abrupt economic changes in their respective time, regardless of the particulars of each cultural period, offers an obvious starting point for this comparative reading. Faced with an environment in the grips of fundamental change, these poets eschewed linear narrative in favor of a mosaic-like composition of signifiers newly available in circulation. Collage then becomes a possibility to provide us an image of an uncharted situation from within.

Key words Popcretos, collage, Sousândrade, Ezra Pound, economy

*... to carry a principle through concrete and apparently disjunct phenomena and observe
the leaves and/or fruits of causation*

Ezra Pound, "The New Learning – Part One," in *Guide to Kulchur*

Given the impact of Ezra Pound's ideas in the formulation of concrete poetry, it is noteworthy that the Noigandres poets initially steered away from collage as a compositional technique. As has been well documented, the ubiquitous modernist trope promoted by cubism became Pound's *modus operandi* during the decades he studiously composed the *Cantos*, weaving quotes, citations, his own translations (Canto XXVI) and music transcription (Canto LXXV) in the

pursuit of a “poem including history.” As it relates to a Noigandres chronology, collage will only appear quite literally in the mid 1960s in Augusto de Campos’ *Popcretos*, a small suite of poems composed for the most part of clippings from newspapers, and magazines. A pivotal work in an otherwise cohesive career, *Popcretos* lets us into the poet’s mind at a moment when Pound’s ideas were being reassessed under the light of a recent discovery: the experiments with poetic montage by Brazilian Romantic poet Joaquim de Sousândrade in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As it were, the reassessment of Sousândrade’s forgotten masterpiece *O Guesa*, which Augusto de Campos undertook with his brother Haroldo, seems to have afforded the two poets a chronological revision of sorts in which collage was no longer understood as a twentieth-century invention, but rather a far more remote practice related to language fragmentation. Given these circumstances, it is fair to suggest that *Popcretos* represents a plunging into the roots of modernity, and it can be read as a corrective to a long-standing misperception of how the avant-gardes operate. Hence, a comparative analysis of the use of collage by Sousândrade, Pound, and Campos offers us an alternative reading of the avant-garde, not in terms of poetic invention, but rather in terms of understanding how cultural changes impact language. That collage became the means of choice for these three poets to address abrupt economic changes in their respective time, regardless the particulars of each cultural period, offers an obvious starting point for this comparative reading.

In his insightful essay “O Campo visual de uma experiência antecipadora” (The visual field of an anticipatory experience), Luiz Costa Lima asks us to consider Sousândrade as a seer (“in its etimological precision without any tinge of the magicism that leads us to obscure the world and, inside it, art” [in the original: “na sua exatidão etimológica, sem nenhuma mancha do magismo com que nos acostumam a obscurecer o mundo e, dentro dele, a arte”]), a poet who projected onto the text his visual experience of the world. He suggests that Sousândrade’s world view differed from the ambiguous position of his Romantic peers who were at the same time “beneficiary and non-participant in the socioeconomic circuit.” (in the original: “ao mesmo tempo um beneficiado e um ausente de participação no circuito socioeconômico”) The son of land owners, Sousândrade experienced nineteenth-century society from a privileged angle, having lived periods abroad and working in New York as a newspaper editor at a pivotal moment when the first generation of the very wealthy was implementing the country’s capitalist structure. Costa Lima considers the section in Canto Ten of *O Guesa*, commonly referred to as “Wall Street Inferno,” as perhaps the first aesthetic

correspondent of the world of liberal capitalism. Using fragments collected from his daily readings of the news, Sousândrade was able to circumvent clichés of the Romantic tradition to produce a work that lacked unified sequence, of polymorphic character: “it was necessary to abruptly cut off, impart violence and movement to his vision as to avoid the verse to fall back in the commonly vident form” (in the original: “era necessário cortar bruscamente, emprestar violência e movimento à visualização para que o verso não recaísse na forma comunalmente vigorante.”) He adds that the poet needed chaos, “a verse that would whirl around, a violence that would shake syntax to free itself from imminent faking” (in the original: “ele necessita do caos, de um verso que rodopie, de uma violência que abale a sintaxe para que se liberte do iminente falseamento.”) He also notes that Sousândrade was pressured to establish a form that “attained beauty precisely for being chaotic and apparently distressed. In reality what was being distressed was a false mind operation (in the original: “Sousândrade foi pressionado a estabelecer uma forma que alcança a beleza justamente por ser caótica e aparentemente destroçada. Na verdade, o que se destroçava era uma mentação falsa.”)¹ Costa Lima’s lucid depiction of a poet breaking free from the constrictions of his epoch to become a seer is something important to consider. His notion of visionary does not carry the metaphysical connotations that T.S. Eliot imputed to the term in one of his his essays on Dante. On the contrary, based on the writings of Lucien Goldmann, Costa Lima means to convey one’s ability to detect the *new* at the moment it emerges and to gauge its impact on the social order. More specifically to the scope of this essay, Costa Lima identifies in Sousândrade one of the first instances in which vernacular language contaminated and threatened the poetic norm.²

¹ Luiz Costa Lima, “O Campo de uma experiência antecipadora,” in *re visão de sousândrade*, ed. Augusto de Campos and Haroldo de Campos, third edition, (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2002), 461-503.

² Cf. T.S. Eliot, “Dante” in *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, fourth printing (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), 199-237. Of particular importance for our argument is the following passage: “Dante’s is a *visual* imagination. It is a visual imagination in a different sense from that of a modern painter of still life: it is visual in the sense that he lived in an age in which men still saw visions. It was a psychological habit, the trick of which we have forgotten, but as good as any of our own. We have nothing but dreams, and we have forgotten that seeing visions—a practice now relegated to the aberrant and uneducated—was once a more significant, interesting, and disciplined kind of dreaming.”

Richard Sieburth has also identified a “semiological disorder” in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* and stressed the need to read the passages related to economy as a “mosaic of signifiers without signifieds (or, more precisely, of signifiers treated as if they were signifieds),” noting that they “function less as tokens of commodities or signs of value than as sheer inscriptions, sheer traces, the rewritten residue of reading.” Sieburth further observes, recalling Michel Foucault, that both money and language are conceived as equivalent semiological systems, and that Pound’s economic writings, shaped by this assumption, focus almost exclusively on issues of monetary representation, inscription, and circulation, “virtually bracketing the question of economic production.”³ The analogy between these two semiological systems is not a modernist novelty, and we can identify its roots in the Middle Ages with the parallel evolution of monetary policy and the development of rhetorical practice and theory. Sieburth also brings up an essay by Eugene Vance which suggests that the evolution of monetary policy and the development of rhetorical practice in the later Middle Ages may be seen as a strengthening consciousness of *media of exchange*, and identifies an art of inflation affecting both the monetary system (“those princes who would devalue gold currency for profit”) and rhetoric (“poets who give themselves too easily to the high and noble style”).⁴

Faced with an environment in the grips of fundamental change, Sousândrade and Pound eschewed linear narrative in favor of a mosaic-like composition of signifiers newly available in circulation. Collage (or better yet bricolage, since we are here working by means of signs, and not by means of concepts)⁵ then appears as a possibility to provide us an image of this uncharted situation from within. This reasoning, I argue, is applicable to Augusto de Campos’ *Popcretos*, a work produced as a new bourgeois class emerged in Brazil following the military coup of 1964. Moreover, the series marked the poet’s acknowledgement of a new era as mass media was increasing its presence in the country.⁶ Offering the news of the day as

³ Richard Sieburth, “In Pound We Trust: The Economy of Poetry/The Poetry of Economics” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Autumn, 1987), pp. 142-172 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 142-172.

⁴ Eugene Vance “Chaucer’s *House of Fame* and the Poetics of Inflation” in *Boundary 2*, Winter, 1979, Vol. 7, No. 2, *Revisions of the Anglo-American Tradition: Part 1* (Winter, 1979), pp. 17-38 Published by: Duke University Press,

⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 20.

⁶ Following the end of World War II, the growing reach of the press in Brazil was responsible for popularizing avant-garde debates such as the concrete/neo-concrete polemics through the creation of weekly cultural supplements to major newspapers. Those supplements in time gave

poetry, *Popcretos* is invested of a sense of emergency, and as often happens with art engaged with the moment, the series is pregnant of new ideas and themes loosely outlined. These sketches of ideas are, however, entirely consistent with the line of development pursued by Noigandres as a group, and Augusto de Campos in particular.

POPCRETOS

It's uncertain whether *Popcretos* was made specifically for the exhibition that opened at Galeria Atrium on December 9, 1964, featuring sixteen artworks by Waldemar Cordeiro, four collage-poems by Campos, and a "collective composition" coordinated by Damiano Cosela. Although the title seems to acknowledge American pop-art, Cordeiro's artworks as well as Campos' collage-poems are more aligned with a tradition of assemblage that we find in European artists such as Daniel Spoeri and Kurt Schwitters. In a brief text for the catalog ("brief exposition on an exposition of expoems" [in the original: "breve exposição sobre uma exposição de expoemas"]) Campos addressed the exhibition title with a nod to Marcel Duchamp: "caught and chosen / according to the aleatory nature of ready-mades / through a concrete will" [in the original: "colhidos e escolhidos / no aleatório de ready made / por uma vontade concreta"]. Regardless of the specifics of its genesis, the fact is that Campos continued to work with collage for another two years. The exhibition presented four poems (made between August and November, 1964): "ÔLHO POR ÔLHO" (Eye for an eye), "O ANTI-RUÍDO" (The anti-noise), "GOLDwEATER," and "SS." Three additional collage poems were realized in the following years: "PSIU" (Psst), "LUXO" (Luxury), and "F(J)(Y)EUX" (Fires/games/eyes). In many anthologies "PSIU" has been added to the *Popcretos* suite; "LUXO," however, has often been presented as a stand alone work while "F(J)(Y)EUX" was

way to full fledge publications like the journal *Invenção*, which started as a weekly page in *Correio Paulistano* (1960-1961). In the next decade an ambitious editorial project was set afoot aimed at disseminating high culture and knowledge through affordable fascicles available throughout the country in newstands. Alongside the proliferation of photonovelas, comics, and weekly glossies, a widespread readership had access to collections such as *Grandes Compositores da Música Universal* (Great composers of universal music, 1968-1970) based on the Italian series issued by Fratelli Fabbri. Other series comprised encyclopedic collections on visual arts masters, playwrights, and philosophers. For more on this subject see my essay "Environment, Object, Action: Graphics by Other Means in the New Century," in *Trienal Poli/Gráfica de San Juan: El Panal / The Hive* (San Juan, PR: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2012), 82-103.

never printed in its collage form and later used as the basis for “oeilfeuju” in the 1970 collection *Equívocos*.⁷

The exhibition catalog provides helpful explanation for each collage, as to guarantee correct reading of the poet’s intention. The first poem, “SS,” addresses the ambiguity of signs (the “physiognomy of letters” [in the original: “a fisiognomia das letras”]) that acquire whatever meaning is ascribed to them. The case in point is the acronym SS that can refer to the Gestapo, His Holiness the pope (in Portuguese, “Sua Santidade”), and even to the hot topic of the monoquini (*sans soutien*). Pulverized around the page, fragments of letters, words, and clippings of texts mean to emulate the chaotic display in the newsstand, with its mixing of political coverage and entertainment. The poem considers the debasement of language (of the sign) as an indicator of societal transformation; printed matter (the news, packaging of mass-produced consumer goods) as an indicator of the dissolution in (of) language in cities like São Paulo where it has become signage, advertisement and merchandise. In another level, the poem telegraphs more immediate concerns hinting at the military coup that had taken place earlier that year: “2 months of rage in the newspapers. clippings. packings. the talk of the tribe. details-detriti of reality. the liberty in letters. the brazilian anthropophagic chaos redestroyed by the titlemania of an anarchitect” (in the original: “2 meses de raiva nos jornais. recortes. revólucros. a fala da tribo. detalhes-detritos da realidade. a liberdade em letras. o caos antropofágico brasileiro redestruído pela manchetomania de um anarquitecto”).⁸

⁷ it is worth noting that in “Esquema geral da Nova Objetividade,” Hélio Oiticica makes a passing reference to Cordeiro’s *Popcretos* noting that Cordeiro’s “proposition fuses the semantic to the work’s structural aspect. For him, the desintegration of the physical object is also semantic desintegration, for the construction of a new meaning.” (in the original: “proposição na qual o lado estrutural [o objeto] funde-se ao semântico. Para ele a desintegração do objeto físico é também desintegração semântica, para a construção de um novo significado”). And although he does not reference Campos’ series of poems, his analysis could also be applicable. For the complete text, see *Escritos de Artistas: Anos 60/70*, organized by Glória Ferreira and Cecília Cotrim (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2006), pp. 154-168.

⁸ For the poem “SS,” Campos provided the following entry: “the ambiguous Ssemantic of abbreviations. The pope. The gestapo. The supreme soviet. The monokini [sans-soutien]. The physiognomy of letters. From abstract symbol to iconic sign, vice-versa. 2 months of rage in the newspapers. clippings. packings. the talk of the tribe. detaiils-detriti of reality. the liberty in letters. the brazilian anthropophagic chaos redestroyed by the titlemania of an anarchitect. “a ambígua Ssemântica das SSiglas. o papa, a Gestapo, o soviete supremo, o monoquini, a fisiognomia das letras. de simbolo abstrato e signo icônico, vice-versa. 2 meses de raiva nos jornais. recortes. revólucros. geSSy, eSSo, modeSS. a fala da tribo. detalhes-detritos da realidade. a liberdade em letras. o caos antropofágico brasileiro redestruído pela

The next poem, “O ANTI-RUÍDO,” is structured around an image inspired by a verse in *Paradiso* (“dal centro al cerchio e sì dal cerchio al centro”)⁹ in which Dante relates the movement of wise discourse to water circling inside a vase, making waves in the periphery and back again to the center. Campos adds another analogy, that of a “nuclear explosion-implosion,” to address the fragmentation of language going on in high-society reporting that abbreviates words to make them more palatable: “nat” for *natalício* (birthday), “deb” for debutante, and so forth.

In “GOLDwEATER,” Campos evokes Hieronymous Bosch apocalyptic equation of excrement and money by transforming discarded packagings of cigarettes (Goldleaf) and chocolate coins into a mock-up of a religious icon. The title is a play on the name of ultra-conservative American senator Barry Goldwater, who was running for president in 1964 against Lyndon Johnson. In the catalog, Campos describes the collage subject as “papaouro,” an ambiguous portmanteu that can signify “gold eater” and “gold pope.” “gold contamination,” he wrote: “from a sign charged with iconicity (gold + color + texture) to the non-sign (white square) semantically contaminated. the maximum and the minimum of redundancy. from the desintegration of the object to a semantic autoantrouropofagia: eaten coins” [in the original: “do signo carregado de iconicidade (gold + cor + textura) ao não-signo (quadrado branco) semanticamente contaminado. o máximo e o mínimo de redundância. da desintegração do objeto à autoantrouropofagia: moedas comidas”]; note that the portmanteu “autoantrouropofagia” inserts *gold* (ouro) at the center of anthropofagy.

The last work commented in the catalog is the most iconic of the series: “ÔLHO POR ÔLHO,” a pyramidal accumulation of eyes clipped from different sources.¹⁰ Once again,

manchetomania de um anarquitecto.

⁹ See Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso* 14: “Dal centro al cerchio, e sì dal cerchio al centro movesi l’acqua in un ritondo vaso, secondo ch’è percosso fuori o dentro: ne la mia mente fé subito caso questo ch’io dico, sì come si tacque la gloriosa vita di Tommaso, per la similitudine che nacque del suo parlare e di quel di Beatrice . . . (From rim to center, center out to rim, so does the water move in a round vessel, as it is struck without, or struck within. What I am saying fell most suddenly into my mind, as soon as Thomas’s glorious living flame fell silent, since between his speech and that of Beatrice, a similarity was born).

¹⁰ Jaques Donguy compiled a helpful index of all the elements in “OLHO POR OLHO” that also includes other public figures such as Fidel Castro, Pelé, Miguel Arais, Sammy Davis Jr, John F. Kennedy, Sophia Loren, Shirley Mac Laine, Juscelino Kubitschek, Bertrand Russell, Françoise Hardy, Brigitte Bardot, and Elizabeth Taylor. Augusto de Campos, *Anthologie: despoesia*, preface and translation by Jacques Donguy, (Paris: Al Dante, 2002)

Campos draws from Dante (“esto visibile parlare”) to comment on the replacement of text by images in his poem: stars, starlets, politicians, poets, beasts, birds, house appliances and so forth. Notable among the celebrities of the day is the inclusion of fellow Noigandres poet Décio Pignatari, and Joaquim de Sousândrade.

In 1966 Campos created “PSIU,” which since has been added to the suite *Popcretos*. Surrounding a woman’s mouth, a carefully orchestrated collage of clippings recycles the news of the past months including the release from jail of Miguel Arraes, the mayor of Pernambuco who had been arrasted in the aftermath of the coup two years earlier: “Saber viver. Saber ser preso. Saber ser solto” (To know how to live, to be put under arrest, to be freed).¹¹ References to the somber political atmosphere is conveyed fragmentarily with words like “ATO” (alluding to the series of Institutional Acts issued by the military junta), and “AME” (referring to the slogan “Brasil: Ame-o ou deixe-o” [Brazil: Love it or leave it]).

Two additional collages were produced in the following years: “LUXO,” 1965, and “F(J)(Y)EUX,” (year unknown, possibly 1966). In an email exchange with the author, I was informed that “LUXO” (Luxury), was conceived in response to the noticeable capital gains of the upper middle class that supported the military coup. Inspired by a newspaper advertisement for luxury apartments that was published on October 7, 1965, “Luxo” effects a powerful critique of rampant consumerism in bourgeois circles and their disregard for the common good. Operating simultaneously along micro- and macrostructural levels, “Luxo” veers close to the semiotics poetry that Pignatari was exploring around that same time. Essentially a collage of repeated newspaper clippings, its individual elements (luxo) are laid out to spell its opposite (lixo: trash). This play with micro- and macrostructures evokes both linguistic theory as well as urban planning in that, if one accepts that each icon stands for a “luxury tower” unit, the ensuing composition presents a dismal vision of the city. Campos’s ear and eye for the vernacular are ultimately what have made of this poem an emblem of its epoch. Constructed of words (lixo, luxo) that in the mid-1960s epitomized in popular culture the dichotomy between high and low in Brazil, the poem is nevertheless made playfully accessible in purely musical terms (lee-shoo, loo-shoo). With utmost economy of graphic

¹¹ The phrase refers to a public statement issued by Arraes as he left prison and embraced to exile in Algeria. I borrow a translation by K. David Jackson from his essay “Augusto de Campos and Trompe l’œil in Concrete Poetry.” In *Media inter Media: Essays in Honor of Claus Klinger*, ed. Stephanie A. Glaser (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 270.

means, “Luxo” sets off a clash of equally conflicting information as the poem takes on the modular vocabulary of modernistic architecture while employing a typeface often associated with kitsch. The title promises a commentary on luxury (luxo), while the final product reads like a monument to trash (lixo).

Although never published, “F(J)(Y)EUX” can be considered a liminal work in Campos’ oeuvre. In contrast to the poems in *Popcretos*, “F(J)(Y)EUX” lacks any immediate political connotation, and its composition suggests a rather formalistic exploration of typefaces. In that sense, the work seems to announce a new phase in Campos production free from the restrictions of the typewriter and Bauhausian design (more specifically the Futura typeface). In the decade that followed, Campos would experiment with a variety of typefaces in search of unique solutions for each poem. Consider “Eco de Ausonius,” 1977, for example, and his translations of William Blake (“The Sick Rose” [A rosa doente, 1975] and “The Tiger” [O tigre, 1975]). Ultimately, his interest in typeface and graphic design in that period produced iconic works, like “VIVA VAIA,” 1972, and “Código,” 1973. Thus, considered in retrospect, the *Popcretos* suite (and “F(J)(Y)EUX” in particular) triggered an important new phase in Campos’ career by allowing him to explore each poem on the basis of their formal aspects.

Frayed Semantics

With its surprising handiwork, *Popcretos* marks a shift in Augusto de Campos’ career from the highly conceptual, rigorously diagrammed works from the 1950s composed by typewriter, and anticipates the protean style that since then has become a hallmark of his work. To better contextualize *Popcretos* we must consider its production twelve years after the release of *Noigandres 1*, the publication that launched the concrete poetry movement in Brazil. By the mid-1960s, as their ideas gained international attention, the movement was undergoing an important turning point at home, a shift most clearly evident with the release of the group’s second publishing venture, the journal *Invenção* (1962-1967), under the editorial oversight of Décio Pignatari. An editorial note in the first issue stresses the need for a new basis for the *production* of the artwork: “There is no formal logic, of class [in Brazil], to explain, based on national demand, why we have for example, eight refrigerator factories, nine for television sets, and six for blenders, before we got our first tractor factory” (in the original: “Mas não há lógica formal, classista, que consiga explicar, com base na necessidade nacional, porque

tivemos, por exemplo, oito indústrias de geladeiras, nove de televisores, e seis de liquidificadores, antes de têmos uma só de tratores”).

Although *Invenção* ran for only five issues, it marked a new approach to the avant-garde by championing a deeper engagement with Brazil’s literary tradition. To set the tone, the first issue dedicated most of its pages to a comprehensive essay by Cassiano Ricardo looking back at the legacy of the Modern Art week of 1922, followed by an essay by Pignatari on the current state of poetry in Brazil. In the next four issues, the journal documented Pignatari’s growing interest in semiology and in the writings of C.S. Peirce; it also introduced to readers Haroldo de Campos’ experiments with prose-poetry (the *Galáxias*), and Augusto de Campos’ growing interest in image (*Popcretos* and *Profilogramas*).¹²

¹² The last two issues of *Invenção* devoted generous attention to Haroldo de Campos’ *galáxias*, and featured ample documentation of the *Popcretos* exhibition and poems. Issue 4 presented a selection of *galáxias* introduced by a helpful explanatory note (“dois dedos de prosa”), and included a special section on the exhibition *Popcretos* with texts by Augusto de Campos, and Waldemar Cordeiro (“Arte Concreta Semântica”). (*Invenção, Revista de Arte de Vanguarda*, n. 4, December, 1964). The journal’s final issue featured four collage poems by Augusto de Campos: “SS,” “Anti-ruído,” “Psiu,” and “Luxo,” as well as “Profilograma 1—Pound-Maiakóvski,” which overlapped portraits of the two poets by Gaudier-Breska and Rodchenko. (*Invenção, Revista de Arte de Vanguarda*, n. 5 December 1966-January 1967). Coincidentally this last issue registered the early reception of Sousandrade abroad: “Sousandrade’s Stock” in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, 24 June 1965; “Sousandrade nous provoques encore,” by Pierre Furter, *Journal de Genève, Literary Supplement*; “Crisi del linguaggio e avanguardie letterarie in Brasile,” by Luciana Stegagno Picchio, *Paragone*, n. 190- Milano; “Notícia de Sousandrade,” by Ángel Crespo and Pilar Gómez Bedate, in *Revista de Cultura Brasileira*, no. 12, Madrid. The *Times Literary Supplement*’s article notes: “Writing in elyptical verses, multilingual, and inflected by limerick Sousandrade creates a montage of political events of the day, newspapers’ articles literary references to convey an ironic vision of the birth of moden North America.” The juxtaposition of these new bodies of work from the Campos brothers in *Invenção 4* is intriguing as it stresses how often they approached similar problems to arrive at different solutions. Consider one of the *galáxias* published in this issue (“no jornalário . . .” (by the newsstand . . .), about which Haroldo affirmed: “as galáxias não são apenas feitas de epifanias, mas também de antiépifanias. O ‘raro’ e o ‘reles.’ Momentos de paraíso e momentos de inferno. Como a vida. Como a história” (the galaxies aren’t made solely of epiphanies, but of anti-epiphanies as well. The ‘rare’ and the ‘vulgar.’ Paradisical moments and infernal moments. Like life. Like history). We could suggest a symmetry of sorts between these two bodies of work as they are both informed by a collagistic practice of piecing together residues of *life* and *history*. Last but not least, we might also take into account Pignatari’s essays on semiotic that were published in *Invenção*, as well as his own experiments on advertising. In this pivotal moment in the group’s journey, we can still find a cohesive dialogue between their different explorations.

The release of *Popcretos* also coincides with the publication of Augusto de Campos' "Pound Made (New) in Brazil," an essay looking back at the time when he and his brother Haroldo approached Pound, then interned at St. Elizabeths Hospital, in Washington D.C. The key Poundian ideas incorporated into the Noigandres program have been stated many times over, but it is curious how his influence is restated in the context of this essay. Campos argues, for example, that concrete poetry was less interested in the epic form than on addressing discursive language, hence Pound's greatest contribution was the "poetic technique related to montage and the idiomatic mosaic." Another important development instigated by Campos' readings of Pound was a revision of Brazil's literary history based on the principle of *invention*, and in the second half of his essay, he sketches out his approach to the poetry of Sousândrade, which he undertook in collaboration with his brother. Of prime interest to Campos is the section in Canto Ten of *O Guesa* that deals with the New York Stock Exchange ("the center of financial speculations, conceived as an infernal circle"). According to Campos, in this section Sousândrade's cosmovision touches upon ideas that Pound came to develop in the *Cantos*: "setting aside the extravagant solutions Pound advocated for economic themes and the misguided political affiliations he adopted, we can identify in both poets a common and fundamental aversion to the nefarious power of money. The capacity, to echo Michel Butor, 'de percevoir poétiquement le phénomène de l'économie'" (in the original: "Postas de parte as soluções extravagantes que Pound preconizou para os temas econômicos de sua obra e as equivocadas vinculações políticas que assumiu, pode-se assinalar em ambos os poetas uma aversão comum e fundamental aos poderes nefastos do dinheiro. Aquela mesma capacidade de 'captar poeticamente o fenômeno da perversão da economia,' para usar de uma expressão de Michel Butor a propósito de Pound [*Répertoire*, I]"). Campos describes "Wall Street Inferno" as an "atemporal *bal-masqué*" that echoes the ups and downs of the American political and financial worlds in the 1870s against a broader international background. Surely this kaleidoscopic description of Sousândrade's sequence, with its "typographic versatility, the graphic physiognomy of newspapers" (in the original: "a versatilidade tipográfica, a fisionomia gráfica") could as well be applied to *Popcretos*, but in this essay Campos is most keen on approximating Sousândrade's style to Pound's: "the imagist technique, the synthetic-ideogrammic diction that involves processes such as compression of history, montage of colloquial or literary quotes, or of *fait-divers* of the time, idiomatic *pot-pourri* fusion of personae,

besides the conversational fragmentation”¹³ (in the original: “a técnica imagista, a dicção sintético-ideográfica, que envolve processos como a compressão da história, montagens de citações coloquiais ou literárias ou de ‘fait divers’ da época, ‘pot-pourri’ idiomático, fusões de ‘personae,’ além do fragmentarismo conversacional”). More recently, in an introduction to a new edition of *O Guesa*, Campos defined Sousândrade’s fragmentary style of mixing images of nature with personal experiences interspersed by reflections of clear social tenor as “semantically frayed”¹⁴ (“esgarçada semântica”) suggesting a relationship between social unrest and semiological disorder. This disorder, he reminds at the end of his introduction invoking Mallarmé “les contemporains ne savent pas lire.”

Certainly, the gradual insertion into poetic language of elements deemed “un-poetic,” such as market brands (see Sousândrade’s reference to Pear Soap in “Wall Street Inferno” 128/2, and Pound’s abstracting the logo of the Monte dei Paschi into an ideogram in Canto XLII),¹⁵ can be seen as paving the way to more disruptive practices such as Campos’ in *Popcretos*, and several other poets thereafter. The implication being that it’s no longer about the “rewritten residue of reading,” as proposes Sieburth, but a new practice of reading (and incorporating into the text) what is all around; the acknowledgement that a new socio-economical reality has been established. It is worth reminding that the same year that *Popcretos* was released, Belgian poet Marcel Broodthaers famously proposed to transform his poetry

¹³ Augusto de Campos, “Pound Made (New) in Brazil,” in *A Margem da margem* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989), 99-112. The essay looks back on the reception of Ezra Pound’s work in Brazil starting in 1944 with a curious entry on his musical compositions in Mario de Andrade’s *Pequena história da música*, and the central place his poetic theories played in the conception of concrete poetry. The essay offers a comprehensive look at the Campos brothers correspondences with Pound while at St. Elizabeths, and also with Pound scholar Hugh Kenner, who writes in a letter dated May 11, 1955: “I envy the existence of newspapers that publish articles about such topics,” referring to articles Augusto de Campos published in *Diário de São Paulo*.

¹⁴ Cf. Augusto de Campos, “Errâncias de Sousândrade,” in Joaquim de Sousândrade *O Guesa* (São Paulo: Selo Demônio Negro, 2009),

¹⁵ In Canto XLII Pound narrates the creation in 1472 of Monte dei Paschi, (“a mount, a bank, a fund a bottom a credit institution”), guaranteed by Cosimo I de Medici based on tax revenue on grazing land outside Sienna Pound saw in this establishment the “true bases of credit, to wit the abundance of nature and the responsibility of the whole people.” Pound admitted no mystery about his cryptic method and mused that it would be more intelligible to the general reader as history becomes better understood. Cf. Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (New York: New Directions, 1970—Eleventh Printing), 194.

into artworks in order to make a living: “Moi aussi, je me suis demandé si je ne pouvais pas vendre quelque chose et réussir dans la vie . . .,” as he explained in the invitation for his first gallery exhibition.

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The correspondences Campos establishes between Sousândrade and Pound suggest a more complex understanding of the workings of the avant-garde, now considered not merely on the basis of formal invention but rather in terms of a poet’s acute awareness of the changes taking place at his own time. Extrapolating its original militaristic meaning, the avant-garde becomes not simply an issue of aesthetics, but a powerful factor in social activism.¹⁶ In regard to Sousândrade, it’s unlikely that he saw himself as avant-garde, a term he used to praise the common American citizen (“young people of the avant-garde”)¹⁷ invested in bringing the republican ideal to modern civilization. As for Pound, his formulation about the great artist as an antenna signaling the future seem equally in tune with an engaged view of the avant-garde. Although highly streamlined and succinct, *Popcretos* ought to be seen along these lines set forth by Sousândrade and Pound. Conceived a decade after the release of *Poetamenos*, fragmentation is achieved in *Popcretos* not through the influence of new (musical) theories, but as direct reaction to a new reality emerging at that moment. Thus, besides capturing an important socio-political moment in Brazil, the sequence also reflects on the mass-media apparatus that was in many ways shaping the era.¹⁸

¹⁶ In *Vanguarda e subdesenvolvimento* (Avant-garde and Underdevelopment, 1969), Ferreira Gullar posed the question of whether a concept of *avant-garde* honed in Europe or in the United States would be applicable in an underdeveloped country, and suggested that in Brazil the *new* (whether ideas or technologies) contradictorily meant “freedom and submission.” By omitting the connection foreign authors and ideas maintained with their specific national and cultural circumstances, Gullar wrote, the Brazilian avant-garde became victim to a formalist exercise. Issued ten years after the publication of the Manifesto Neoconcreto, *Vanguarda e subdesenvolvimento* seemed to bring to a close the constructivist era in Brazil, in which Gullar had played a major role as poet and polemicist. Gullar’s synchronic and geographic reading of the avant-garde becomes problematic when we consider works such as Sousândrade’s whose anticipatory nature is difficult to determine.

¹⁷ In the original: “—Este é o joven povo da vanguarda; / E na pátria ideal, quanto soffrera, / Pelo quanto de amor e crença houvera, / Sedo o Guesa esqueceu.” See Joaquim de Sousândrade, *O Guesa*, 280.

¹⁸ Although other contemporary artists endeavored to work along the same lines), *Popcretos* seems to convey a more complex understanding of “montage and the idiomatic mosaic.”

Popcretos depicts an environment far removed from the romantic world view disrupted by Sousândrade and even further by Pound. For while Sousândrade, as Costa Lima notes, was a great poet undermined by the colonial structure around him, Campos' experience is of a different order, most tragically marked by the downfall of President João Goulart's efforts to shake up the country's four-centuries old feudal-like structure. According to Costa Lima, Sousândrade had only his "exasperating visualisation of a strange world without the conditions to formulate it coherently," (in the original: "Ele teve de contar apenas com a sua visualização exasperante de um mundo estranho, sem ter tido condições de formulá-la coerentemente"), hence the discrepancy between the cacophony depicted in the "Wall Street Inferno" section and the book overall structure informed for the most part by the romantic world view. As for Campos, under the new climate instated by military rule, poetic language seemed to have lost its currency, and was debased as cyphers from the marketplace. The elements gathered in *Popcretos* represent the ugly side of the Brazilian press (both in form and content) at that particular moment, in stark opposition to the formal revolution championed by concretism in the early 1950s. By incorporating the ugly, the sequence stands out as a paradoxical work that both acknowledges the failure of the Brazilian constructive project, while at the same time pointing to news possibilities of construction. It might be added that although fragmentation was already present in Campos' work at least since *Poetamenos* (notwithstanding its nod to the atonal theories of Webern and Schoenberg), the form became an essential feature of his style after *Popcretos*, demarkating a clear transition from early concretism's focus on reason to a dialectical vision of reality as a dynamic whole that progresses through conflict. To paraphrase Lucien Goldmann, any attempt to tone down the paradoxical nature of *Popcretos* and make it more acceptable to common sense would also involve toning down the scandal of the 1964 coup and thus making it more bearable.

Consider for example Rogério Sganzerla, *Documentário* (1966, black and white, 10:04 minutes). The film follows two friends roaming through downtown São Paulo looking for a suitable film to watch in a lazy afternoon. Their promenade past newsstands and cinema houses allows Sganzerla to document that precise moment in Brazil and abroad through a collage of images of comics, film posters and newspaper headlines. In an early scene, for example, one character glosses over *O Jornal da Tarde*, showing to the camera its main headline: "SUBVERSÃO ESTA VOLTANDO" (Guerrilla is back); later images focus on covers of *Mad* magazine and comics as well as film posters featuring Jean-Luc Godard, Samuel Fuller and Orson Welles.

By bringing the heroic phase of concrete poetry to a closure, *Popcretos* marks an important crossroads in Campos' career as it also hints at the experimental tenor that characterized the years that followed. This new approach culminated in ambitious works like *Caixa preta* (Black box, 1975), the special edition volume designed in collaboration with Julio Plaza that reaffirmed his interest in the fragment. With its allusion to the airplane "black box," essential in identifying the cause of a disaster, the title signals the aftermaths of a tragedy. A retrospective regard is also cast in two important works that appeared in the following decades that take on the form of the epigrammatic fragment to comment on the poet's contribution to the avant-garde: *Pós tudo* (Post everything, 1984) and *Poesia é risco* (Poetry is risk/trace, 1995). The former seems to allude in confessional tone to the early days of concretism and the poet's endeavor to "change everything"; while the latter strikes a bitter-sweet note on the wager of poetry: the "risk" that paradoxically is only a "trace." In their unfinished form, they seem most apt to convey the unfinished business of the Brazilian avant-garde. As we look back at the development of concrete poetry in Brazil in its socio-political context, the words of Lucien Goldmann become highly relevant: "fragment is the expression of a quest for a right order that has not been successful,"¹⁹

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¹⁹ Lucien Goldmann *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the Pensées of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine*, trans. Philip Thody (New York: Verso, 2016), 201.